

Edwards: Bipartisan SCHIP Bill Passes House to Provide Health Coverage to 11 Million Children

Expands Coverage to 4 Million Children of Working Families

(Washington, DC) – U.S. Representative Chet Edwards today supported House passage of H.R. 2, legislation that reauthorizes the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) through 2013, and expands health coverage under the program from 7 to 11 million American children. The bill was approved by a bipartisan vote of 289 to 139.

"This is a pro-family and pro-work bill that will provide health coverage to 11 million children of working families," said Edwards. "As a parent who cares deeply about the health of my two young sons, I can think of few things this Congress could do that would be more important than to see that millions of children receive the kind of health care we would want for our own children. This program is especially important for Texas families, since our state has the highest rate of uninsured children in the nation."

The popular SCHIP program, created in 1997, must be reauthorized by March 31st to provide coverage to children of working families who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, but cannot afford private coverage or their employer does not offer it. The SCHIP program currently covers seven million children, and the House bill would expand enrollment to an additional four million uninsured children. It would give states like Texas the resources and incentives necessary to reach and cover millions of children who are eligible for, but not enrolled in, SCHIP. Today, 1.4 million Texas children are uninsured, or more than one out every five children in the state, the highest percentage of uninsured children in the nation.

"The CHIP program is vitally important for kids and their hard-working families who simply cannot afford the high cost of health insurance. With CHIP, children receive better health care, schools have healthier students and parents are encouraged to pursue work, not welfare, without losing health care for their children. CHIP is a win-win," said Edwards. "CHIP also saves taxpayer dollars because when uninsured children lack access to preventive health care, they end up seeking care at our emergency rooms for untreated illness and that means higher taxes paid by local taxpayers."

The bill is fully paid for by increasing the federal tax on cigarettes by 61 cents. The bill enjoys widespread support from the National Governors Association, AARP, and the American Hospital Association among others. The Senate is expected to pass a similar bill, and President-elect Obama has indicated he will sign into law legislation that expands SCHIP enrollment as one of his first acts as President.

Rep. Edwards represents District 17 in Congress. -30-